

Spring Grove
Va. Rt. 202
Mount Holly vicinity
Westmoreland County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1203

HABS
VA,
97-11040,
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HABS
VA
97-MOHQ
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SPRING GROVE

HABS No. VA-1203

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Spring Grove is an outstanding example of early 19th century architecture and landscaping in rural Virginia. Erected in 1834 by Robert Murphy, the house reflects through its size and fine architectural detailing the prosperity of this prominent Westmoreland county resident. Its interesting brickwork, rich architectural details (derived from the pattern books of Asher Benjamin) and notable dependency layout and lawn place Spring Grove among the finest Post-Revolutionary houses of Virginia's Northern Neck.

In May of 1818, Robert Murphy married Eliza Bland Newton, the sister of Willoughby Newton; this union coincided with the beginning of many land transactions carried out by Willoughby Newton and Robert Murphy. He and his brother-in-law came to hold substantial tracts of land throughout the county. On May 15, 1819 Murphy bought 100 acres of land located on the east side of Nomini Creed (DB 24, 529); in November of 1820 he bought 800 acres in the same area which was known as Bushfield (DB 24, 128); and on November 11, 1824 Willoughby Newton deeded 869 acres of land at Cabin Point to Murphy and his wife (DB 25, 121). With the amount of property that Robert Murphy owned on Machodoc Neck it is hard to pinpoint the actual tract that included the house of Spring Grove. The tax records of 1835 show that improvements of \$1800 were made by Murphy to a 550 acre tract of land 7.8 miles from the courthouse that was boarded by property owned by G. Glascock. This location coincides with that of Spring Grove: Improvements undertaken in 1835 also suggest a construction date of 1834.

The Westmoreland county records indicate that Murphy was very prosperous; he owned and operated a mill on Nomini Creek; was appointed in 1832 to be the treasurer for a public school in Copel Parish; and in 1836 was appointed by the governor to be the sheriff of Westmoreland county. The will of Robert Murphy of March 26, 1847 is the first time that the house is referred to as "Spring Grove".

Drawings of the property and the house by William Rogers, a later owner, add to the interest of Spring Grove. Rogers, the grandson of Robert Murphy, inherited the house from his mother, Jane Murphy Rogers. After her death in 1872, William Rogers moved to Spring Grove; it is during this time that he drew extensive plans, views, and elevations of the interior and exterior of the house and property.

The nephew of William Rogers, John Rogers Williams, was a later owner of the house. Living for the most part in Princeton, he was a librarian and administrator at Princeton University. While at Princeton he was the first editor for the Princeton Historical Society and at this time edited the journal of Philip Vickers Fithian, which was published in 1900.

Architecturally Spring Grove is interesting because of the use of Asher Benjamin's pattern books. Details from the American Builder's Companion

and the Practice of Architecture used in the house reflect the awareness in the Northern Neck of current architectural trends occurring in Boston during the 1820's and 1830's. As progressive as the architectural details are the rural aspects of the Northern Neck reflect in the layout of the dependencies and grounds. The arrangement that survives is one that was popular in 18th-century Virginia, but rarely used after 1800. The combination of a Federal-style architecture and Greek detailing with an older form of dependency arrangement makes Spring Grove a notable landmark in the Northern Neck.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Spring Grove is a Federal-style residence with Greek detailing. Erected in 1834, the brick dwelling is a two-and-one-half-story central-hall plan house covered by a gable roof.

Set on a brick foundation, the front (south) elevation is laid in Flemish bond. The five-bay facade is accented by a handsome, tetrastyle pedimented portico of the Ionic order, derived from plate 14 of Asher Benjamin's American Builder's Companion. Railings survive on the sides of the porch and filled in holes on the insides of the paired columns are evidence that railings connected them. The portico shelters the first floor entry, which is rusticated with stored stucco. The entrance, set in a paneled frame, has a rectangular fanlight transom, paneled double doors and a large stone sill. The fenestration consists of 6/6 hung-sash windows framed by an architrave made up of bead moldings and surmounted by jack arches. The louvered shutters are original to the house.

The rear (north) elevation, like the other secondary walls, is laid in three course-American bond. A one-room brick addition, perpendicular to the main structure, and built of five-course-American bond, was added to this elevation soon after the initial construction. A rear door entrance is provided to enter the first floor. To this brick addition two shed lean-tos of wood have been made. Both are 20th century in origin. The fenestration consists of the original 6/6 sash windows flanked by shutters. The cellar entrances are located on the exterior of the main structure on either side of the brick addition.

The west elevation is void of articulation except for a single 6/6 hung-sash window in the attic. The east elevation is identical except for the addition of a glassed-in porch that was added in 1924. The house has a center-hall, double-pile arrangement. The stairhall is located to the rear of the house, running perpendicular to the center-hall.

The interior of the house has distinguished architectural elements. The center-hall is divided from the stair-hall by a handsome arch that surrounds a pair of louvered doors and an elaborate fanlight. The double-doors are framed by pilasters that are made of a symmetrical architrave

trim terminated with capitals that are embellished with carved rosettes. The arch springs from the capitals and is accented by a symmetrically molded keystone. The architrave molding of the arch is ornamented by rope moldings and carved rosettes; the rosettes are alternated with fluting. The horizontal support of the fanlight radiates from a half circle that has been carved with a floral motif; each of the lights is ornamented with a curved piece of tracery that was applied over the glass in the late 19th century. The inner door frame is paneled and decorated with rope molding. The arched doorway and moldings were derived from plate 32 of Benjamin's American Builder Companion. The doorways in the hall and throughout the first floor have symmetrical architrave trim with corner blocks that have been finished with plaster. Flooring is random width heart pine. In the southwest parlor, however, the flooring is regular widths of heart pine. The hall ceiling features an original stucco ceiling medallion composed of acanthus leaves and simple moldings. The original lamp hanging from the medallion remains in place.

To the southwest of the central-hall is located the parlor. The focal point of this room is the mantel, which consists of paired columns that sit on a plinth composed of a base, three balls, and block. The columns support an elaborately executed entablature and mantel shelf; the facings and hearth are marble. Plates 27 and 37 from Benjamin's American Builder Companion were used as the source of the paired columns and entablature. Located on the southeast side of the central-hall is the dining room, which contains a mantel that is identical to the one in the parlor but its facings and hearth do not survive. The windows in the parlor and dining room have symmetrical architrave trim with carved corner blocks, the inner frames are paneled; the entire window treatment is taken from plate 43 of Asher Benjamin's Practice of Architecture.

Behind the louvered doors of the entrance hall is located the stair-hall, running from east to west. The stair, located to the left in this passage, ascends to the second floor. The open-string stair has simple sawn-scroll brackets, a round handrail, and rectangular balusters--two to a tread. At the west end of the passage is the pantry, which retains original built-in shelves and cupboard. To the east of the passage is an arched doorway that leads to the "rear hall" which is terminated by a small butler's pantry. The door to the brick addition, known as the kitchen, is very simple; windows are framed by the same symmetrical architrave molding and corner blocks found on the first floor.

The second floor rooms are more restrained and less elaborate than those on the first floor, and the mantels are simpler. Built into the sides of the chimney stacks are small closets. In the center-hall of the second floor is located a closed-string staircase that ascends to the attic.

The attic contains a central room that is flanked by two others. All three rooms are finished and retain original plaster work. Throughout the house there is evidence that the doors and woodwork were elaborately grained in two colors; graining survives on the backs of doors in the attic and on the second floor.

Two of Spring Grove's original dependencies survive. The kitchen is a one-story brick building of American bond with a gable roof; and a saw-tooth brick cornice. The kitchen has been greatly altered, but the drawings from the 1880's indicate what the original scheme was.

A smoke house of wood with a pyramidal roof survives and retains its original door and hardware. It is located 36 feet from its original site.

A drawing and photographs show that a frame office with a gable roof and a daily completed a symmetrical layout of the dependencies in relationship to the main house. A brick wall that has been repaired by the present owners was used to join the dependencies to the house. Drawings also indicate the design and plantings of the lawn in front of the house; in an arrangement that has survived intact to the present day. The use of a formal layout of the house, lawn, and dependencies is very atypical in 19th-century Virginia.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture. The documentation was produced in the Spring Semester, 1983, by Henry M. Cochran, III, Graduate Student in Architectural History. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.